

Naval War College Review

Volume 44
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 27

1991

Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War

Lawrence J. Korb

David Callahan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Korb, Lawrence J. and Callahan, David (1991) "Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 44 : No. 4 , Article 27.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol44/iss4/27>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

U.S. participants in future base negotiations.

WILLIAM HICKMAN
 Captain, U.S. Navy
 Newport, Rhode Island

Callahan, David. *Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War*. New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1990. 511pp. \$24.95

In the last four years, three books have been published about Paul Nitze. In 1988, Stroble Talbot published *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace*. A year later Nitze published his own memoir, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision*, and in 1990 we have David Callahan's *Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War*.

While *Dangerous Capabilities* is similar to and covers much of the same ground as the other two books mentioned, Callahan himself is quite different. Unlike Talbot (who has been *Time* magazine's Moscow correspondent and head of *Time*'s Washington bureau) and Nitze, Callahan is no Washington insider. He is only three years out of college and barely twenty-five. Mr. Callahan started writing this book as a junior in college (presumably as a term paper) and spent two years finishing it after graduating.

Judged by even the most rigid standards, Callahan has produced a remarkable book. In *Dangerous Capabilities* he has given us a sweeping, authoritative, and readable history of

the men, the ideas, and the politics which formed American national security policy for the last fifty years. Callahan has focused his analysis on Nitze because the "gray fox" served six of the last eight presidents and was closely involved in most of the bureaucratic and political struggles which shaped Cold War policy. As Callahan notes in his preface, "to understand this [Nitze's] life is to begin to understand the Cold War." Or as Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, George Shultz, noted, "wise men come and wise men go, but decade after decade there is Paul Nitze."

Callahan has given a critical but thoughtful analysis of this complex personality who: debunked the myth of the impact of strategic bombing through his work on the strategic bombing survey; almost single-handedly created the "missile gap" and "window of vulnerability" through his overly mathematical analyses of the strategic nuclear balance; played a major role in shaping the successful policies that averted nuclear catastrophe in Cuba and Berlin; and saved arms control in the Reagan administration after nearly destroying it in the Carter years.

The Paul Nitze who emerges in Callahan's work is both a heroic and tragic figure. Unlike some who are appointed to high political posts, Nitze was both a master bureaucrat and a strategic thinker who grasped even the most arcane details of his various posts in the Departments of State and Defense, and as an arms negotiator. Moreover, unlike many

political appointees, Nitze was more interested in the substance of the job than the title and often took positions with less prestige than he had previously held.

On the other hand, despite his longevity in government, Nitze never received a cabinet-level position, and on three occasions was blocked from high posts because he was considered "too liberal." Moreover, NSC 68, the blueprint he developed for fighting the Cold War, formed the intellectual basis for our involvement in Vietnam, a war Nitze opposed. Similarly, Nitze's often shrill objections to SALT II were turned against him a decade later to prevent him from getting a START I accord.

Finally, Nitze's positions on issues were often colored by whether he was inside or outside government. While a member of the Reagan administration, he repudiated the antiballistic missile treaty which he had negotiated for Nixon. When not given a post by the Carter administration, he called into question Paul Warnke's patriotism and opposition to the war in Vietnam, despite the fact they had worked closely together in the Pentagon in the 1960s.

Callahan's analysis of the man and his impact on waging and winning the Cold War is superb. However, his conclusion that the price this nation paid to win was too high is not only unsubstantiated but incorrect. After 503 pages of well-documented and balanced analysis, Callahan spends less than a page blaming all of this nation's problems (and there are many) on

"excessive" military spending, and then takes a cheap shot at Nitze by saying that while the nation's finances are in bad shape, Nitze's own financial situation is better than ever. It is too bad that Callahan did not stop a page sooner, but maybe that was too much to expect from a very young man writing his first book.

LAWRENCE J. KORB
Washington, D.C.

Kaufmann, William W. *Glasnost, Perestroika, and U.S. Defense Spending*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990. 80pp. \$8.95

Glasnost and *perestroika*, two Russian words that have become familiar to American readers, are causing dramatic changes in U.S. defense spending. *Glasnost* denotes a new openness in Soviet society and an end to the Cold War, while *perestroika* signifies the transformation of the Soviet economy from one that is centrally planned, in support of a war machine, to a decentralized one that is concerned about its consumers. These ongoing changes in the Soviet Union have reduced the estimates of a Soviet threat and the U.S. defense spending needed to counter it.

Significant cuts in U.S. defense budgets have already begun. The Bush administration and congressional negotiators have agreed to defense spending cuts of about \$182 billion projected over the FY 1991-1995 period. But Kaufmann argues